

'LADY WHITE SNAKE'

A TALE FROM CHINESE OPERA

RETOLD BY AARON SHEPARD & ILLUSTRATED BY SONG NAN ZHANG

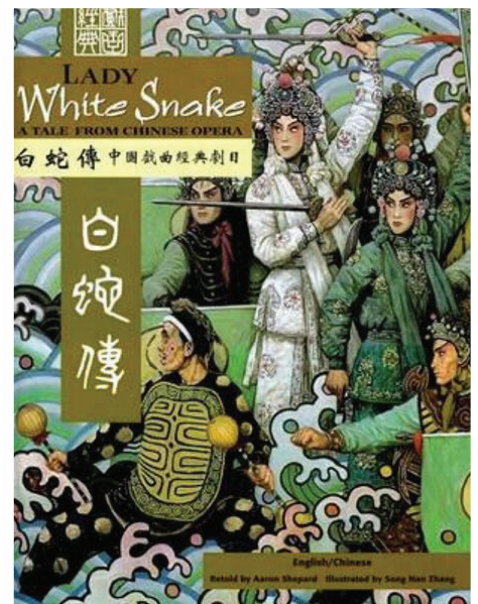
ISBN 1-57227-072-1 AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON BOOKS

Activities for Stages 2 & 3 developed by Julie O'Keefe

<https://pixabay.com/photos/background-backdrop-pattern-design-2406119/>

Introducing the Story

- Take the cover off the book and lay out in front of the students to explore (using multiple copies of the book for a closer look would be a great way to approach this narrative).
- Students discuss their impressions of the artwork and other information on the cover including the overview of the story and the information about the author and the artist.
- Discuss the title, the characters depicted in the artwork and the possible event that could be happening on the cover. Ask students to identify Lady White Snake.
- Encourage a browse through the book before reading and identify some features of the layout and information included (eg. how to say the names, about the Chinese title in calligraphy, and the guide to Lady White Snake).



Exploring and responding the the narrative

- Read the story to students; students read the story to each other in small groups or pairs. Discuss impressions of the story and describe what it's about.
- Identify the features of the narrative-orientation, complications and resolutions.
- Name and describe the characters in the narrative, listing their qualities and their role in the story.
- Discuss the language used to create the mood and atmosphere in the story (eg. adjectives, setting up the complications).
- Explain the meanings of fabled, predicament, abbot, traitor, pardoned, avenge, pagoda.
- Illustrate and explain the phrase '*I stand in two boats at once!*'
- Talk about the theme of trickery and deceit running through the narrative - is it positive or negative? Can concealment of information by the characters about themselves be justified?
- Talk about heroes and villains - decide and explain your choice as to the characters who were the real heroes of the story.
- Identify and discuss the values and virtues permeating this story through the qualities of each of the characters and the situations they found themselves in.

- Map the story using diagrams, circles and arrows to sequence the development of the story.
- This story is a legend. Discuss and list the conventions of a legend - what are the common features to stories written this way?
- Discuss and describe the connection between the illustrations and the text - explain how the illustrations enrich the storyline.
- The battle inside Gold Mountain Temple between Fahai and the heavenly warriors and Lady White, her sister Blue and the army of water animals is depicted on the cover. Identify the main characters and describe how the battle scene is portrayed.
- In pairs or small groups, select a complication and resolution and rewrite it. Share with class through performance or story-telling.
- Write a review of the story.
- Lady White Snake is regarded as one of the most popular legends in China. Give reasons for this popularity.

Going further

- What if ...
 - Xu Xian had not given his umbrella to Lady White?
 - Fahai had not told Xu Xian to give Lady White realgar wine?
 - Lady White had not flown to Kunlun Mountain to steal a miracle mushroom?
 - the Old Man of the South had not pardoned Lady White?
 - Xu Xian had not believed Fahai?
 - Lady White and Blue had not rowed to the island to rescue Xu Xian from inside the Gold Mountain Temple?
 - Lady White had not changed her white sash into a living snake?
 - Lady White had not been captivated by the golden rays of the alms bowl?
 - Blue had forgotten her sister being imprisoned in Thunder Peak Pagoda?
 Students work in pairs on a 'What if' situation and construct a consequence chart to show the possible effects of the action.
- Take sections of the story to act out as Reader's Theatre; make and use simple Chinese masks to wear to enhance the Reader's Theatre. Consider the impact of telling the story through the dialogue.
- Versions of this legend have changed over time. In the earliest versions Lady White was a man-eating demon and the Buddhist and Taoist priests who intervened were heroes. Consider the story in light of these roles for Lady White and Fahai - would it improve or detract from the narrative? Which version do you prefer and why?
- View some performances of this legend on the following Youtube sites. Compare the performance with the book. Discuss and describe similarities and differences, the role of the effects, singing, acrobatics, etc.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L62AbaczjF4>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8MmaQgVP4&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZi3xDDxQtA&feature=related>

More to do

- Rewrite the narrative as a play and perform it.
- Rewrite the ending - release Lady White from the Thunder Peak Pagoda.
- Find out more about the illustrator Song Nan Zheng and his art style:
<http://biography.jrank.org/pages/2329/Zhang-Song-Nan-1942.html>
- Locate China on a world map. Locate Hangzhou, the West Lake near Hangzhou, Zhenjiang, the Yangtze River and Mount Emei on a map of China. Find out some key information about the

features of each of these places and what it is about them that connects to the story.

- Write the name of the legend in Chinese calligraphy using black ink or paint and brushes.
- Research the Dragon Boat Festival and find the link with snakes and the festival.
- Find out about Chinese Opera in terms of the formula for the storyline, the place of music in the performance and the significance of the colours and styles of masks used by the characters.
- Make Chinese opera masks. The following websites provide useful information, examples and directions:

<http://www.paulnoll.com/China/Opera/>

http://www.firstpalette.com/Craft_themes/World/Chinese_Opera_Mask/Chinese_Opera_Mask.html

(It is preferable for students to design their own mask instead of just colouring in.)

- Visit Aaron Shepard's website: www.aaronshep.com

